

**Transcript of Radio Tirana Interview with Ambassador Marcie B. Ries  
USAID-funded "Rruga me Pisha" Radio Program**

**Reporter:** Ms. Ambassador, I am Diana Leskaj. Thank you for accepting our invitation for this interview.

**Ambassador:** Thank you. I am very glad to be here.

**Reporter:** Madam Ambassador, we know that the U.S. Government places a high priority on fighting trafficking in persons because it is a known violation of human rights and is a threat to national and international security due to its links to organized crime. You, yourself, have expressed a personal commitment to this issue. Can you say a little bit about why this issue is important to you?

**Ambassador:** Well, first of all, in my capacity as U.S. Ambassador to Albania, I have had the opportunity to meet and talk with some of the victims of this horrible crime. They are brave women and girls from throughout the country who have suffered cruel manipulations and even violence. It is nearly impossible to be indifferent to stories of sexual trafficking and exploitation in general, and hearing personal stories from the victims. One can't help but be affected and move to action.

My professional commitment to this issue in Albania can be seen in the U.S. Government effort to end the trafficking in persons, to protect and help victims, and to assist in the prosecution of those who treat people like commodities and keep them in slave-like conditions.

But of course, I also have personal feelings about this issue. As a mother and a career woman, I'm sensitive to women and children who haven't had the same opportunities I've had or who may have grown up in extreme poverty, with limited access to education, or with violence in their lives. I am personally invested in helping to support projects in Albania that can work to make the lives of all Albanians better, and particularly those who are vulnerable to trafficking.

**Reporter:** Do you think poverty and the lack of education is the root cause of trafficking in Albania?

Not entirely. Traffickers are people who prey on weakness. There is no question that the difficult social and economic realities in parts of Albania make some women desperate. I've met some of the victims of trafficking, and these girls tell stories of being promised marriage, an opportunity to live abroad with boyfriends, and employment. Traffickers deceive young women by manipulating their hopes and dreams. Victims are pushed to find a way out of the hardships in their lives, but traffickers take advantage of this and lure women with these false promises.

**Reporter:** What should women and girls look for when they are confronted with an opportunity to go abroad or a marriage proposal?

**Ambassador:** I would advise young women to always check and then re-check any offer of employment abroad. Ask how the visa was obtained. If you are told no visa is necessary, then that should be a very worrying signal. Research it as thoroughly as you can. Ask about the specifics of the job offer. Check the internet for information about the company, ask friends and family for advice, and listen to people who might oppose your decision; they are trying to help you.

When you receive a marriage request, be prudent. In many trafficking cases, Albanian girls are manipulated through false wedding promises. To avoid being caught in a ruse, meet and speak with the man's family and friends. If the young man requests a confidential or hidden engagement, you must tell your family. If you decide to go abroad with him, have a plan of where to go and who to contact if it doesn't work out.

**Reporter:** What message would you like women to think about or know about this issue?

**Ambassador:** In all of our countries we have a tendency to avoid talking about trafficking because it really is a shocking subject. As a mother, I know that sometimes it can be difficult to talk openly to your children about tough social issues like violence, prostitution, or drugs, for example, but I strongly encourage those listening to this program to have those important conversations in your families and in your communities as a way to help your daughters protect themselves and not take dangerous risks. The ability to make good decisions is the most effective form of protection you can offer your child.

**Reporter:** And yet, Albania is still a very conservative society. Do you think victims of trafficking have any hope of regaining control and leading normal lives?

**Ambassador:** There is so much stigmatization and discrimination against women and girls who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation in any society, it makes their recovery and reintegration into a healthy and happy life very difficult. My message to the families and communities in which these women originate would be to recognize these women as victims who deserve your acceptance, and your understanding.

**Reporter:** Do have any final comments today?

**Ambassador:** Yes, thank you. I would like to address the women and girls who have survived trafficking and may be listening today. I'd like to quote Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt, a well-known reformer who worked tirelessly for human rights throughout the world, who said: "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'" I hope you will get on with your lives and persevere in recognition of all that you have overcome and remember, that like Eleanor Roosevelt also said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." Continue to have your own voice, fight

for your dignity, value yourselves, hold your heads up high, because you have the right and the capacity to accomplish great things.

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